

THE

HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

June 2008

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The June luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, June 19, 2008, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The speaker will be Ellie Morris, a Jackson native and now a resident of Virginia. She will discuss her book, *Cooling the South*, about the era of the block ice business in Mississippi and the Deep South. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call **by noon on Wednesday, June 18** to assure your reservation and to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-five people. The price of the lunch is \$8.00.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hope this message finds you well and ably tolerating the heat. The temperatures lately have made it seem more like late summer rather than late spring.

Much activity continues at the Historical Society including finishing touches on our renovation and the inventorying of cemeteries in Hancock County. Charles and our webmaster, Marianne, as well as Dot Champagne, Shirley Blankenship, and Louis and Pat Fuchs have been burning a lot of expensive gas searching for and photographing cemeteries all over the county. If you are aware of a cemetery in the county, family or otherwise, that you think these sleuths haven't found, please call the Society. Next on their agenda

(Continued on p. 4)



Richmond Barthé in 1940

RICHMOND BARTHE, HANCOCK COUNTY'S AMERICAN SCULPTOR

Edited by
Eddie Coleman

Richmond Barthé (1901—1989) was a man who endured and triumphed as he followed his own star, a star that led him to many parts of the world in search of op-

portunities to express the creative vision that marked his presence in this life and, according to Barthé, preceding lives.

Barthé often referred to himself as an "Old Soul" who had been here before. In discussing his belief in reincarnation, he insisted that during an earlier life he was an artist who lived in Egypt. He believed that he was an artist in each earlier life and that he would always be an artist. How else would it have been

THE

HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Eddie Coleman, Editor
Linda-Lou Nelson, PublisherPublished monthly by the
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Marianne Pluim, Webmaster**LOBRANO HOUSE
HOURS**MONDAY — FRIDAY
10:00AM — 3:00PM
Closed: 12:00—1:00 (lunch)**MISSION STATEMENT**

“TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION.”

possible for him to accumulate the experiences and skills that he displayed in his more recently completed life?

Born in Bay Saint Louis, Barthé is a native son whose statues in marble, bronze, and stone are in museums and private collections in France, England, Germany, India, and a half-dozen other foreign countries.

His works are permanently displayed in the Metropolitan Museum and the Whitney Museum in New York as well as many other major museums in the United States. His great American eagle is used at the entrance of the Social Security Building in Washington, D. C.

Barthé won two Julius Rosenwald Fellowships and two Guggenheim Fellowships on merit alone. He holds the Audubon Artist Medal of Honor and numerous awards and citations from the American and National Academy of Arts and Letters. In addition he received awards for interracial justice and honorary degrees from Xavier and St. Francis Universities. He also received the Audubon Artists Gold Medal in 1950.



Paul Robeson as “Othello”

by

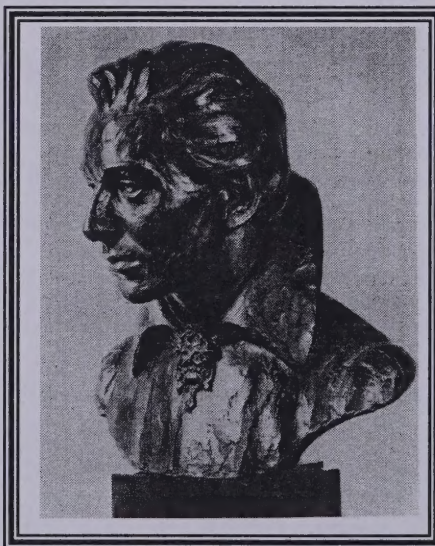
Richmond Barthé

With two honorary art degrees he once said that he didn't get to high school because his mother was a widow and he was taken out of the seventh grade to help support the family. Mrs. Marie Robertson Barthé, his mother, was a seamstress, and when her son was small, she often put him on the floor with pencil and paper while she was at her tasks.

As he grew, beauty and form always attracted him. His pockets held pretty bits of broken glass, sea shells, or a dried leaf of unusual shape, and his one ambition was to be a painter, not a sculptor.

During the summer months and on weekends, he worked for the Harry S. Pond family who had a summer home on the corner of South Beach and Ballentine Streets in Bay Saint Louis. In 1917 when he was sixteen years old, he went to New Orleans with them as a butler, and the family gave him his first oil paints for a Christmas gift.

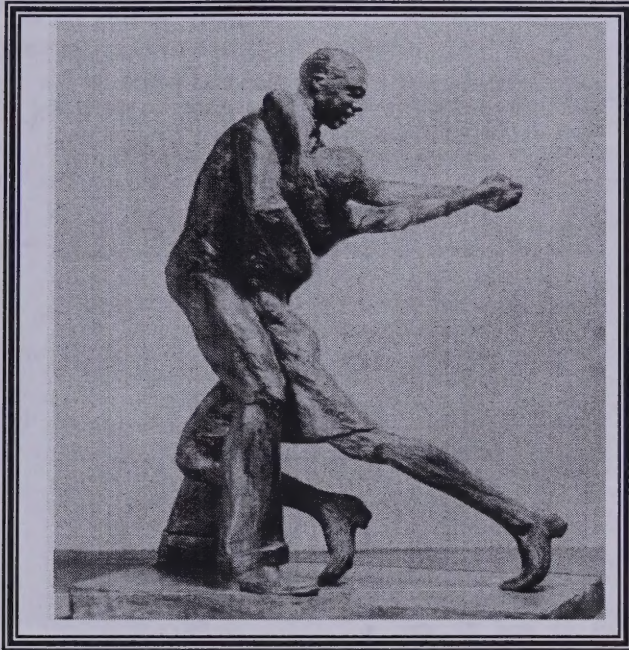
“I had never seen an artist at work,” Barthé remarked, “and didn't even know how to apply oils to canvas.” He learned composition by copying old masters from a volume of reproductions which cost him a hard-earned \$25.00.



Sir John Gielgud as “Hamlet”

by

Richmond Barthé



"The
Rug
Cutters"

by

Richmond
Barthé

Lyle Saxon, author of *Fabulous New Orleans*, discovered his work and encouraged him by posing and then criticizing the result. Occasionally Saxon sent him to the Delgado Art Museum [now the New Orleans Museum of Art] with a note, and these few occasions gave Barthé his first opportunity to see good original pictures.

Barthé's first exhibit was at a church festival in New Orleans. His life-size painting of the Head of Christ so impressed Father Harry Kane of the Blessed Sacrament Parish that he helped Barthé to study at the Chicago Art Institute.

His first attempt at sculpture was in 1928 when he modeled the heads of two friends just as an experiment. He was requested to exhibit these in a Chicago art exhibit called "The Negro in Art." These were reproduced on a New York magazine cover, and Barthé was on his road to fame as a sculptor.

In February 1929, following his graduation from The Art Institute of Chicago, Barthé moved to New York, where he began to rise to stardom as a sculptor. During the next two decades, he would

build a reputation that would prove to be the envy of many of his peers. The 1930's and '40's would see him rise to great prominence. No other sculptor in the United States during this period received higher praise for his work by critics and more visibility in the New York press.

In New York, Barthé established his first studio in Harlem. He began to fraternize with writers, dancers, and theater personalities soon after he arrived in New York. His reputation as a sculptor was generally known in Harlem and was acclaimed by philosopher/art critic Alain Locke, who praised his sculpture and regarded it as fresh and vibrant.

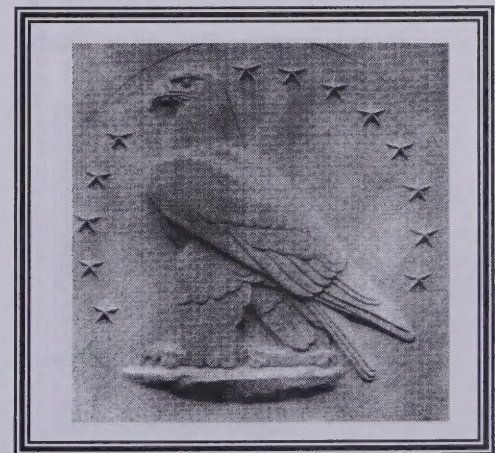
The theater had long interested Barthé, and some of his best known works were in this field. As his commissions of theater personalities increased, he decided to move his studio from Harlem to a larger, more comfortable space downtown. One New York critic said that Barthé had the entire New York theater to himself as a sculptor. His model of Katherine Cornell as "Juliet" is in a private collection in Argentina, and he mod-

eled Sir Lawrence Olivier, Dame Judith Anderson, Sir John Gielgud, Maurice Evans, and Gypsy Rose Lee among others.

Although his stated reason for moving downtown was motivated by his need to be accessible to his clients, another reason was that he loved the theater and wanted to be in the company of the stars of the "legitimate" theater. Living downtown also made Barthé more available for invitations and free tickets to theater and dance performances.

Barthé once remarked, "My work is finished mentally before I ever go to the material." He had a photographic memory and rarely asked an actor to pose. He preferred to study his subjects night after night from a chair in the orchestra during the performance. He believed an actor lived on the stage, but in the studio he was likely to become wooden.

In New York, Barthé experienced success after success. He was considered by writers and critics as one of the leading "moderns" of this time. However, the busy, tense environment in which he found himself took its toll, and he decided to abandon his life of fame at the peak of his career and move



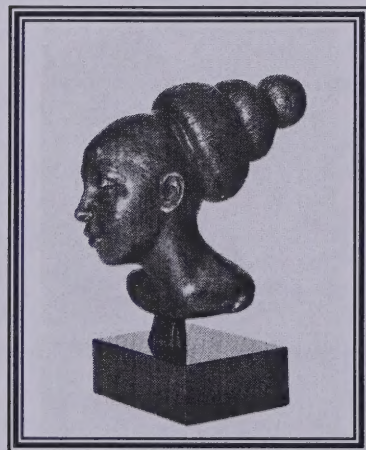
American Eagle
by Richmond Barthé
Social Security Building
Washington, D. C.



Christ
by Richmond Barthé

to Jamaica. Here he remained for twenty productive years. Away from the limelight, he was in a place that, although distant from his beloved Bay Saint Louis, reminded him of the place of his childhood. There he could commune with nature and experience the beauty of the land.

In the mid-1960's he left Jamaica and spent the next five years of his life in Switzerland, Spain, and Italy before settling in Pasadena, California. During his last years he thought of returning to painting but instead worked on his memoirs and resumed his communication with his friends in nature—the birds, bees,



Josephine Baker
by
Richmond Barthé

and other living creatures that he could trust.

The significance of the art and life of Richmond Barthé establishes a chapter in the history of art in America. His poise, dignity, intelligence, and esthetic sensibility are all reflected in the timeless monuments that he has left for our enjoyment and appreciation. These monuments, Barthé's sculptures, are from the heart, mind, and spirit of a man who endured and who triumphed as he followed his own star.

SOURCES:

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wiki/Richmond_Barth%C3%A9](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richmond_Barth%C3%A9)>.
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Vertical files. Hancock County
Historical Society



President's Message (Continued from p. 1)

is moving the Catholic birth, wedding, and death records to our ever-expanding and impressive website. If you're interested in helping on any of these projects, all you have to do is volunteer.

With the renovation of the Lobrano House nearing completion, we need to do some housecleaning that will free up space in the original part of the house. This housecleaning will include assessing all the items presently contained therein and determining whether to keep or to pitch each one. Items that we save will need a place to be stored. If you happen to know of any storage space, preferably in the downtown area, that might be available for the society to use, please tell us.

Finally, during its last meeting, the Board of Directors approved an increase in price in our monthly luncheons from \$7.00 to \$8.00. We would have preferred not to do this, but increased costs have made it necessary. Even at \$8.00, I think all would agree there's no better deal anywhere.

Hope to see you at our luncheon on June 19.

Scott Bagley

BOOKS FOR SALE AT LOBRANO HOUSE

Bay Saint Louis: Celebrating the First 300 Years
By the HCHS (\$15.00)

A nostalgic keepsake of the city's history including descriptions and pictures of many of the historic buildings and houses especially those along Beach Boulevard prior to Katrina

Heritage Cookbook

By the HCHS (\$15.00)

A collection of our members' favorite family recipes

Holly

By Paul La Violette (\$20.00)

An intriguing anthology of tales of a tomcat living in a beach house on the Gulf Coast

Katrina Cookbook

By Charlet Russell (\$19.95)

A collection of recipes by Bayou Tours

Mississippi's No-Man's Land

By Marco Giardino, Ph.D., and Russell Guerin (\$10.95)

The story of the Koch family, early settlers of Hancock County, and their experiences during the Civil War, based on their letters

One Dog, Two Dogs, Three Dogs, Four...

By Paul La Violette (\$20.00)

Twice told tales of several dogs living in a beach house on the Gulf Coast

Sink or Be Sunk

By Paul La Violette (\$30.00)

A recounting of the naval battle in the Mississippi Sound preceding the Battle of New Orleans in 1812

A White Egret in the Shallows

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The First Baptist Church of Bay Saint Louis, MS, at 141 Main St. is listed as #391 on the National Register of Historic Places. This picture was taken in 1999.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

BAY SAINT LOUIS

By
Scott Bagley

This is the fifth in a series of articles on historic churches in Hancock County. This month we return to Bay St. Louis and take a look at the First Baptist Church located at 141 Main Street.

Historical church documents reflect that the first Baptist sermon in Bay St. Louis was likely preached in 1846. About twelve years later a Baptist church known as Elim was constituted with fourteen members, equally divided between whites and blacks, with Elder W. H. Varnado of Hancock County as the first pastor. While its exact location is unknown, records would indicate it was located only a short distance from Bay St. Louis.

Elim Baptist Church was dissolved in 1877 and a new church was constituted with thirteen members, all

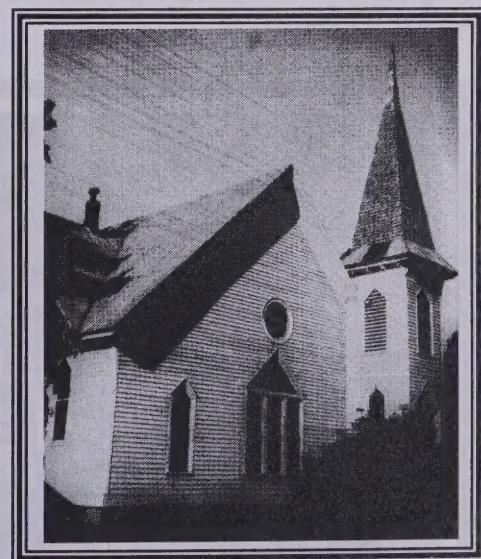
white, as the end of the Civil War brought the separation of races in this and other churches in the area. This new church was the first organized Baptist Church within the township of Bay St. Louis. Services were held on a weekday and were conducted in the Methodist Church facilities.

In 1895 the Baptist Church acquired a plat of land measuring 253 feet on Easterbrook Street and 73 feet on Toulme Street. The land was purchased from Mrs. Dan (Jean N.) Seal for \$75.00, and the deed was taken in the name of "[the] Reverend J. J. Mathis, H. L. Pledger, H. M. Graham, William Sylvester, and Mary C. Lumkin, Trustees of the Baptist Church of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi and their successors in office." By 1896 the new church building was "closed-in" and "partially seated" with chairs donated by various friends. In the same year, the First Baptist Church of Bay St. Louis was "officially" organized with about fourteen charter members.

Services were held in the church until 1900 when they ceased for a couple of years. During this period the building was rented by a

local Episcopal congregation. The First Baptist Church was reorganized in 1902 through a covenant entered into by six persons: Brother W. H. Holden, W.W. Stockstill, the Reverend C. L. Corwin, Mrs. W. T. McDonald, Mrs. W.M. Graham, and Mrs. H. L. Pledger. Another period of irregular services ensued from 1904 to 1913. In early 1913 the Reverend Carl M. O'Neal took charge of the church by appointment from the State Mission Board and served as part-time pastor for two years.

In 1918 the city of Bay St. Louis purchased a part of the church lot for \$150 between Easterbrook Street and Cedar Rest Cemetery. The money from the purchase was used to purchase another lot for a planned for, but never built, parsonage. In 1922 additional church property was sold to the city for an addition to the cemetery. By this time church membership had swelled to seventy-nine, but by 1928 only thirty-two members were active. The then current pastor resigned because the church was unable to pay his salary. The church then cooperated with the Pass Christian Baptist Church and employed a



First Baptist Church at its Easterbrook Street location

full time pastor on alternating Sundays.

In 1945 the First Baptist Church accepted a deed tendered by Dr. T. B. Sellers donating a lot for a new church building on Main Street near the U. S. Post Office. In 1947 the U.S. Government offered for sale twelve army chapels at Camp Van Dorn in Centreville, Mississippi, at \$1,250 each. The church, under the pastorate of A. H. Gregory, purchased one of the chapels and hired a contractor to dismantle the chapel and rebuild it on the church lot on Main Street. Near the end of 1947, the first services were held in the new church building, and by 1949 church records reflected a membership of about two hundred members.

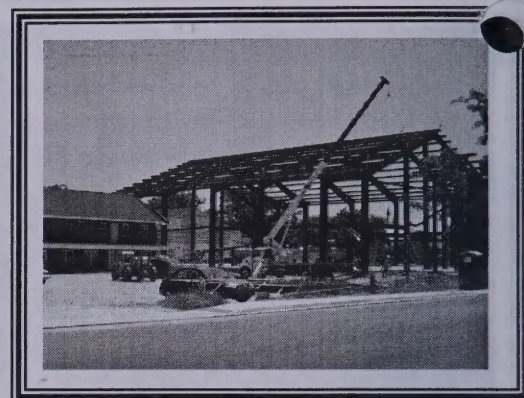
In 1953 the church purchased additional property behind the church building at a cost of \$9,000 to be used for the construction of an educational building. A full fledged educational building was not completed and dedicated until 1969 next to the youth activity building that had been constructed previously in 1959.

In 1973 residents of Bay St. Louis heard the first radio broadcasts of the church's worship services over station WBSL.

On May 15, 1977, the church voted unanimously to renovate the sanctuary at a cost of \$16,000. The very next day, in the early morning hours, the church was ravaged by fire. The greatest damage was found in the pulpit area, choir loft, some of the baptistry areas in the sanctuary, and fellowship hall in the rear of the sanctuary. As a result, Sunday school classes were moved to Christ Episcopal School and worship services were held at Christ Episcopal Church on Sunday mornings following the Episcopal services. Night services were held in Virginia Hall, also at Christ Episcopal Church.

Within months of the fire the church decided to rebuild the damaged buildings. On April 9, 1978, services resumed in the restored church with the dedication thereof on October 15 of the same year. Renovation continued in 1985 with an expansion of the educational building and remodeling of the fellowship hall, classroom building, and balcony.

By 1990 the First Baptist Church boasted a resident membership of 472 and 335 non-resident members. This same year, with the issue of casinos on the Gulf Coast, the church voted unanimously to op-



Construction of the new sanctuary of the First Baptist Church begun in 2008

pose all forms of gambling, and its position was well publicized along the coast.

This historic church of Bay St. Louis celebrated its centennial on April 19, 1996, with a celebration and homecoming event at the church and Hancock High School. As the centennial publication stated: "[t]he [church] was planted in 1846, but it took fifty years to become a mature plant. Several sprouts had occurred, but they died. The year 1896 was the magic year of maturity."

As with other churches in Hancock County, Hurricane Katrina of 2005 took its toll. While its location on Main Street likely saved it from overwhelming destruction, the church did take damage from water, requiring, among other things the rebuilding of the sanctuary. Even with the damage, however, the church buildings served as a very visible temporary home for countless relief workers who came to the area to help Hancock County residents get their lives back in order. The new sanctuary construction is currently underway on Main Street and serves as a positive reminder of the progress our county continues to make in its recovery.

The First Baptist Church showing that it, too, was damaged by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In addition to the destruction of the steeple, there was heavy water damage to the structure.



(SOURCE: *The History of First Baptist Church of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi The First 100 Years 1896 - 1996* compiled by Beatrice Ladner)



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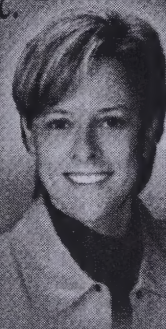
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Saturday, June 14: Darden North,
Jackson physician,
signs his medical thriller
House Call.

5:00 P. M. to 7:00 P. M.

Saturday, June 28: Launch Magruder
signs his novel
Without Regard
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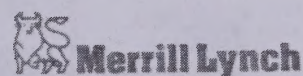
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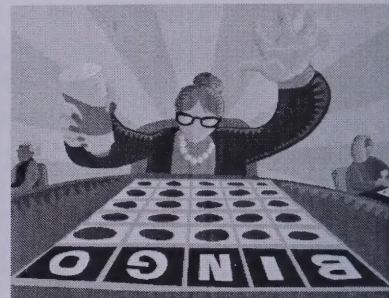
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in the Shallows**

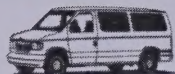
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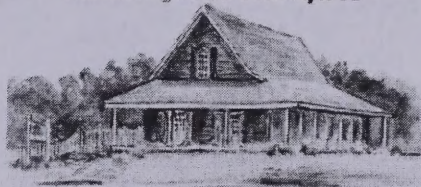
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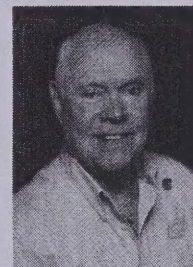
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